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Near East and South Asia Review

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Articles

India: Major Military Maneuvers

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The Indian Army will begin its largest ever field maneuvers in January near the Pakistani border. The exercise, code-named Brass Tacks IV, will use current Indian war plans against Pakistan and is designed to challenge the imagination of India's primarily infantry-oriented Army commanders. High-level Pakistani officials acknowledge that the maneuvers will not be a prelude to invasion, but Islamabad appears to be using the exercise to strengthen its case for increased military assistance from the United States. The maneuvers will add to the increasing number of issues that have stalled Indo-Pakistani rapprochement.

Brass Tacks Exercises

The Indian Army has scheduled an unusually large exercise for the first three months of 1987.

Brass Tacks IV will involve some 150,000 troops, 1,500 tanks, and 500 artillery pieces. The exercise scenario, built around Indian contingency plans for a war with Pakistan, calls for opposing forces to maneuver in the northern Rajasthan Desert training area between Suratgarh and Bikaner, some 50 kilometers from the Pakistani border. One armored, one mechanized, and three infantry divisions, plus two independent armored brigades, will operate against a smaller force consisting of one armored and one infantry division, supported by two independent armored brigades. The larger force will establish a bridgehead across the Rajasthan Canal and then conduct an armored breakout.

Brass Tacks IV will build on the experience gained by the Indian military in three smaller exercises, also codenamed Brass Tacks, taking place this year. Brass Tacks I, a command post exercise, was held in New Delhi from 21-24 July. It was designed to test the

logistic, communications, and administrative skills of Indian corps and division commanders. According to [redacted] used their war plans in the exercise, which was preceded by an [redacted] assessment of the capabilities of Pakistan's I and X Corps opposite Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir. Indian Army strategists expect these forces to carry out Pakistan's key offensive thrusts in a future war.

Brass Tacks II and III this fall will probably consist of Indian Army division and corps-level exercise.

Brass Tacks II will be a preparatory exercise for Army support units, such as combat engineers, while Brass Tacks III will be a corps-level exercise in the Rajasthan Desert. The Indian Army usually conducts field maneuvers at this level between September and December near the Pakistani border as part of its normal training schedule. Elements from selected units deploy to local training areas not far from their cantonments. This year some of these exercises apparently are being directed from New Delhi in preparation for the Brass Tacks IV exercise in early 1987.

The Indians normally conclude their annual training cycle with one to two corps exercising in the large training area in the Rajasthan Desert. In 1982 and 1984 these exercises involved about 100,000 men. The Indians used extensive tactical camouflage and concealment measures. In 1984 the exercise involved India's single, newly formed mechanized infantry division. The mechanized division participated again last year in smaller maneuvers involving about 65,000 men.

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(b)(1) Army Chief of Staff Sundarji has organized the Brass Tacks exercises to stimulate the conservative thinking of his senior officers. [redacted]

[redacted] Since assuming command in February 1986, Sundarji's principal concern has been the professional competence of Indian Army officers. In an open letter to the officer corps, he chided senior officers for their lack of technical competence and poor leadership, as well as their ostentatious lifestyles. He has subsequently threatened disciplinary action against recalcitrant generals and encouraged junior officers to display greater initiative. [redacted]

(b)(3) Sundarji clearly wants to force his generals to practice their war plans more realistically. To this end, he has ordered the Army's small force of 12 Hind attack helicopters to participate in the exercise along with other Army aviation assets to simulate the Air Assault Division that the Army plans to form over the next few years. [redacted]

(b)(1) previous Indian training exercises have often been well choreographed affairs in which troops learned very little. [redacted]

(b)(3) We believe the Indian military also has involved its newly created Defense Planning Staff in the Brass Tacks maneuvers to improve coordination between the armed services. This staff, headed by General B. G. Nanda—who comes from the same ethnic regiment as Sundarji and is a close relative of one of India's two retired field marshals—is responsible for coordinating individual service contingency plans and played a large role in organizing this year's large triservice amphibious exercise near Goa. [redacted]

(b)(1) [redacted] the Indian Air Force and Navy will participate in Brass Tacks, and their roles probably have been detailed by the Defense Planning Staff:

- The Navy's role will be to patrol the Rann of Kutch and to provide ships for an amphibious landing near Goa in late January. The Navy's new Kilo-class submarine, recently delivered from the USSR, will probably remain on the western coast until mid-February to participate in the Brass Tacks exercise.

- The Air Force plans to participate in Brass Tacks. Some of its most advanced combat aircraft, including the Mirage-2000 fighter-bomber, will participate. [redacted]

Pakistani Reactions

According to Embassy reporting, the Pakistanis have told visiting US officials that they are concerned about the exercise, but they probably do not believe the Indian maneuvers pose an immediate threat to Pakistan. Pakistani military forces have not been put on alert or made special preparations to counter an anticipated Indian military threat in early 1987. One Pakistani armored division is exercising in its normal training area south of Multan and roughly opposite the Indian exercise area. [redacted]

[redacted] that a key high-ranking Pakistani military officer is taking extended leave before the exercises, further indicating Pakistani lack of concern. [redacted]

Islamabad is particularly concerned by India's failure to notify it of the exercises in accordance with an unwritten bilateral understanding. Indian Ministry of Defense officials have indicated that the Pakistanis have asked whether notification will be forthcoming. [redacted]

[redacted] the Pakistanis claim they have not yet been notified by New Delhi. Notification has normally been provided through flag meetings attended by Indian and Pakistani Army commanders along the border, although the recently installed hotline between New Delhi and Islamabad could be used for this purpose. [redacted]

Islamabad also is making a concerted effort to use the exercises as a pretext for expanding US-Pakistani defense cooperation. Pakistani officials have asked Washington to keep them apprised of any unusual activity associated with the Indian exercises. They have repeatedly raised the exercises in bilateral meetings on future US military aid to Pakistan. President Zia has requested lower prices, increased concessionary financing, and more advanced weapons, specifically an interim airborne early warning capability. Other high-level Pakistani officials have

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pointed to deteriorating relations with India—along with the continued Soviet presence in Afghanistan—as contributing to Pakistan's poor security environment. We expect the Pakistanis to make increased use of the exercises to press the United States for concessions as the date for the exercises draws near. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

New Delhi probably will honor its commitment to notify Pakistan of its maneuvers as it did in 1984—on short notice and providing only limited information. The Indians will attempt to portray their maneuvers as normal training exercises, rejecting accusations of saber rattling. New Delhi's delay in notifying Islamabad lends credence to Pakistani press claims that the Indians are using the exercises to intimidate them. [REDACTED]

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New Delhi probably will attempt to divert attention from the Brass Tacks maneuvers by pointing to US plans to improve military cooperation with Pakistan. Scheduled visits by US warships to Karachi and weapons demonstrations in Pakistan over the winter months will provide the Indians with numerous opportunities to articulate their security concerns. New Delhi has already indicated its concerns about Pakistan receiving a US AWACS aircraft in the near future. [REDACTED]

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We expect the Indian military exercise to become another contentious issue between New Delhi and Islamabad. Gandhi's mood has clearly changed since last year when he was receptive to establishing cooperative security measures including a bilateral hotline, negotiating disputes over the Siachen Glacier, and accepting Zia's proposal for a mutual ban on attacks on nuclear installations. According to Embassy reporting, Gandhi recently accused Pakistan of not showing serious interest in normalizing relations with India. He made an oblique reference to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and pointedly charged Islamabad with training Sikh terrorists and encouraging the flow of drugs to India. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] We believe many Indian officials, who have never favored Gandhi's attempt to normalize relations with Pakistan, will defend the exercises and strongly respond to Pakistan's protests now that Gandhi has hardened his attitude. [REDACTED]

The Brass Tacks exercises represent an important step toward improving the capabilities of the Indian Army. Sundarji wants to bring Army thinking and management in line with the capabilities provided by the Army's new advanced arms, including T-72 tanks, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, Swedish 155-mm howitzers, and SA-8 surface-to-air missiles. He wants the Army to be a highly mobile force capable of defeating Pakistan in less than two weeks, but the Indian officer corps represents a considerable obstacle. [REDACTED]

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